2013-09-07

Armenian Recovery and Development

Gibbons, Deborah E.

Armenian Recovery and Development

Deborah E. Gibbons and Sally M. Baho

A long bridge connects Georgia's and Armenia's border-control stations. Knowing that Armenia has not fully recovered from the economic and political devastation of the Soviet occupation, we expected militaristic customs agents and degrading roads. We found neither. Friendly border guards processed us quickly into Armenia, responding with broad smiles when Sally asked how to say "thank you" in Armenian. Faced with the long and unpronounceable response, Deborah settled for the European-influenced alternative, "merci."

The countryside in early September seemed dry but lovely, with farms scattered among large hills, fields of wild blackberries, and low pomegranate-dense forests. We were privileged to arrive during apricot season, when farmers sell the sweet native fruit from small wooden buildings alongside the highways. Following a fast-flowing river south toward Yerevan, we stopped at the ruins of ancient churches and monasteries, all of which had been destroyed, rebuilt, and destroyed again by subsequent invaders. Perhaps this history of invasion and destruction has contributed to the Armenian penchant for stone-carving, which can outlast very determined attacks. In many places, we found collections of square or rectangular stones, sometimes chipped or cracked, carved with ornate crosses and saints or Christian symbols—the final remnants of former builders' work.

We came to Armenia to learn more about challenges and successes in small-town and rural development, but our visit began in the modern, international, capital city of Yerevan. From the grand architecture of the city center to the upscale Euro-chic shops, Yerevan welcomes visitors with style and grace. Artists crowd the parks with bright and modern, elegant and classic paintings, often featuring flowers or pomegranates, landscapes or churches. Mt. Ararat, visible in the distance, is a favorite subject. Silversmiths, famous worldwide for their intricate work, sell their products throughout the city, and uniquely Armenian stone crosses decorate city spaces and church yards, dotting highways throughout the country.

In the city of Yerevan, we found members of the Armenian diaspora gathered from residences as far-flung as California, Iran, and Canada. Many of them regularly visit the country their grandparents fled during the Armenian genocide, when Ottoman Turks annihilated over a million Armenians who posed no threat to them. As throughout the nation, the thriving capital city tinges joy with sorrow. The determination of brave and steadfast people, who have overcome countless persecutions, pervades the land. We fell in love with Armenia.

Country Information

• • •

September 21, 1991: Armenia became independent via 99% support from voters

Mt. Ararat is the national symbol of Armenia

99.6% of Armenians are literate

94.7% are Armenian Apostolic Christians

4% are other Christians

(CIA World Factbook, 2013)

45.5% of young adults in Armenia are unemployed

(2008 CIA statistic)

Armenian culture emphasizes survival over self-expression

(World Values Survey data)

Blood, Sky, Apricots

The Armenian Flag

"The Red emblematizes the Armenian Highland, the Armenian people's continued struggle for survival, maintenance of the Christian faith, Armenia's independence and freedom. The Blue emblematizes the will of the people of Armenia to live beneath peaceful skies. The Orange emblematizes the creative talent and hard-working nature of the people of Armenia."

Government of Armenia official website

"The Orange represents apricots for happiness, the Blue represents the sky for peace, and the red is blood shed for freedom."

Armenian woman at a coffee shop in Yerevan

Yerevan's crowded streets map out a patchwork of rich and old—really old—cultural sites, Soviet concrete high-rise, and rapid renovation. The Armenian flag, with its brilliant red, blue, and orange stripes, brightens parks and squares, adorns public and private buildings, and sometimes drapes the shoulders of teenagers in public spaces.

Armenian Apostolic churches, mostly neglected or destroyed by the Soviet government, are being rebuilt, along with large and lovely structures for music and theater. Daily moving-water performances in Republic Square combine impressive fountains with colored lights, all choreographed to an international assortment of classical and modern music.

The Soviet presence remains strong in Armenia, from color-coded fuel pipelines beside most roads to flat-topped, large-diameter hats worn by police. Corruption is rampant. Some efforts have been made to increase transparency in government and to combat police misuse of their positions, but more is necessary. Many Yerevan police earn their living by stopping drivers to collect bribes. According to local stories, this system resists change because the street cops are often required to share their gains with their bosses in order to keep their jobs.

Not wanting to be caught between the penalties for bribing a police officer and the penalties for not bribing him, we opted not to drive in Armenia. This made transportation challenging, as we lacked Armenian or Russian language skills and were handicapped in communicating with taxi drivers. One day we were walking along a street to our hotel when we saw a black Mercedes pulled over by a police car. The driver stepped out to shake hands and converse with the police officer. The driver then returned to his car and leaned into the passenger's window, while the police officer talked with his partner. We could not tell if

The Soviet Political Legacy

"Armenia performs not as badly as Azerbaijan but nevertheless is consistently ranked Not Free in our evaluations of political rights and media freedoms. The country continues to confront a system in which the marriage of politics and business undermines reforms that could result in greater accountability and transparency."

Christopher Walker
Freedom House
May 23, 2012

Soviet Gas Pipes Along an Armenian Highway

the return to the car indicated that an inadequate amount of money had been offered the first time, or if the driver had not passed any funds during the initial handshake. Rejoining the driver near his car, the police officer nodded and spoke quietly before they shook hands again. Then the officer slid his hand into his pocket, returned to his car, and they both drove off. A non-governmental organization is now available to defend drivers who believe that they have been treated unfairly by police, and the national government has launched a campaign to stop the payment of bribes to traffic police.

Banner in Yerevan Airport

Beyond corruption in government, the Soviet approach to birth control, education, and government regulation of the economy has had lasting effects. Induced abortion was the primary means of birth control throughout the Soviet Union. In 2002, the Armenian Parliament confirmed the legality of induced abortion up to 12 weeks of gestation (National Statistical Service Armenia). Armine Martirosyan, Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) Translator at the US Embassy in Yerevan, explained that "Abortion is not usual for the first child. It usually happens if they have two girls, and they want to have a boy for their third child. In Armenia, nearly everyone wants to have at least one boy, and they don't think of abortion as a religious issue. Under the Soviet government, this was how people controlled their family size, and it has continued since then."

We wanted to understand Armenia's most important cultural values, so we asked Armine and her colleague, Ani Melkumyan, Military-to-Military Operations Assistant at ODC, Armenia. Ani immediately answered, "Family," while Armine answered, "Religion."

"Family is highest value," Ani continued. "How will this affect my family, my kids? For a man, as the head of the family, he asks, 'how will this affect them?'"

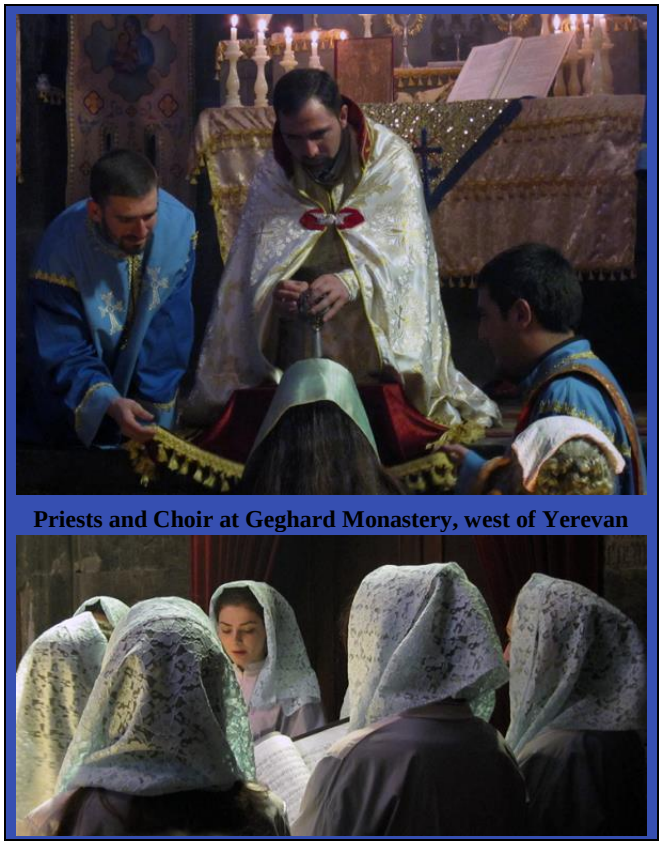
Armine explained that, "Armenians are very proud of their religion. They are one of the oldest Christian countries, and this is important. It is the center of the culture, and the Armenian culture must carry on. The government offers payment for having more children, to help families raise more Armenian children." Armenia was the first country to officially adopt Christianity as their state religion.

Armenian family relations tend to be close, durable, and committed. Ani described the strong sense of responsibility that is shared by Armenian parents. "The child stays a child while his parents are alive–50 years. It's extra care that is always in place. The Armenian parents' mentality is that when the child is born, their life is over. They deprive themselves of things to care for their children rather than caring for themselves. Many parents deprive themselves of everything for the child. There might be an argument about whether this is good or bad." To help young couples with families, the Armenian government now provides about $2400 when the third child is born and again when a fourth child is born. Parents receive about $3600 when a fifth or later child is born (News.am).

Sex-based Births

Sex-selected abortion is common in Armenia because families traditionally want a male heir. The sex ratio at birth for the first child has been 1.04-1.07 boys per girl, in line with the biological average of 1.02-1.06. Ratios for third and fourth children increase to 1.6 and 1.7, respectively.

United Nations Population Fund, Republic of Armenia (RoA) Ministry of Health, RoA National Statistical Service, and The Republican Institute of Reproductive Health, Perinatology, Obstetrics and Gynecology



Priests and Choir at Geghard Monastery, west of Yerevan

Armine added, "It is one of the core values that no matter how old you are, you are still a child."

"We have that close family relationship," Ani continued. "I talk to my mom every day. I saw a t-shirt saying 'I still live with my parents.' That shirt is not funny in Armenia; that is true. When your parents are old, you will take care of them, so families stay together."

Most Armenians are literate. When we asked Ani and Armine to identify the biggest mistake made by international workers trying to help Armenia recover from the Soviet years, they agreed that the most foolish error is to underestimate the competency of the Armenian partners. Ani explained that, "After 10 years of experience: most embarrassing is that people underestimate where they are going when they come to Armenia. They draw parallels with Africa and developing nations. They expect lower education, knowledge, and expertise, and that is not true. So don't underestimate the people you are working with. We have had bad cases where people came and tried to teach very basic things. For example, someone tried teaching accounting to an expert, and he told them to get out."

Armine added, "Education is big here. Every parent wants their child to go to university, even if they are going to be a carpenter. This applies to women, even those who will stay at home. The better educated the mother, the more the children will know. Mothers teach their children at home, and an educated mother is valued."

Despite the extensive network of Armenians around the world, the economy at home remains weak, and opportunities for business development are limited. Professional families continue to leave the country in search of financial opportunities. Ani explained that, "there is always a little tension about people leaving Armenia. A lot of programs are going on to keep the new generations speaking Armenian." To reconnect dispersed ethnic Armenians with the people of Armenia, the government has established a program called Birthright Armenia. Young adults who participate in this program work with local organizations for several weeks, while their travel and living expenses are paid by the government. The program is designed to "strengthen ties between the homeland and Diasporan youth by affording them an opportunity to be a part of Armenia's daily life and to contribute to Armenia's development through work, study and volunteer experiences, while developing life-long personal ties and a renewed sense of Armenian identity" (www.birthrightarmenia.org). About two thirds of Armenians live outside the country, and emigration continues.

Northern Armenia

Economic difficulties in Armenia often push men to seek jobs in Russia or other nearby countries, so they can send money home to their families. The women who remain in Armenia then take responsibility for the farms and the children. Contrary to Armenian culture and values, the husbands sometimes find second wives or girlfriends in the host nation. This pattern has created a reduced labor force for rebuilding Armenia, a lack of male role models for boys, and the threat of sexually transmitted diseases coming into Armenia through the migrant workers. "It is a destruction of the most basic family unit," worries Antonio Montalto, an Italian physician who established and serves as president of the Family Care Foundation in Armenia.

> Culturally, underestimation of your partners is the most important to avoid.
>
> *Ani Melkumyan, US Embassy, Armenia*

Antonio has worked in Armenia for the past twenty years. He first came to oversee medical aid for injured and displaced children in Nagorno Karabakh. This Armenian province had been assigned to Soviet Azerbaijan by Stalin, and after the local Armenians declared national independence in 1991, many were injured or killed by the Azeri military. Antonio appreciated the qualities of the Armenian people, and he sympathized with the challenges they faced in recovering from the Soviet years. After the medical mission ended, he returned to make Armenia his home. His philosophy about the recovery process differs

Emigration and Immigration

3.35 more people per thousand leave Armenia annually than arrive

(2012 CIA statistic)

"The Armenians, they are going, they are going to America, to France, to other countries, and other people are coming here from Baku and the Middle East… twenty years ago Armenians did not come up," she poked me, "and ask you for money." Holding her hand in my face, "Now they do this, asking for money, always wanting something, stopping you on the street, but it is not the Armenians. The Armenians are going and these other people that are coming, I don't like it."

Olga, a Lithuanian-Armenian cardiologist explaining why she intends to emigrate from Armenia

Western Armenia

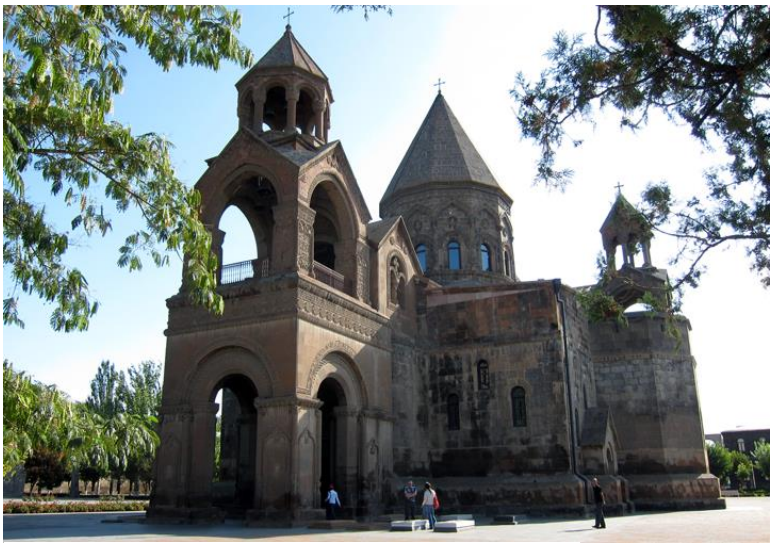
considerably from that of many non-profit and international aid organizations. He doesn't seek donations, and he doesn't believe in long-term distribution of food and goods. He talks about the importance of human dignity, and he argues that the best form of international aid is to provide training and opportunities for local people who are able and willing to build their own economy. His foundation does this through small investments that give unemployed Armenians something to work with. "People have to produce something that is nice, that people will want to buy here, in New York, in Paris."

Family Care Foundation operates a small shop in Yerevan, where they sell traditional Armenian ceramics that people in their art program have created. It is one of several initiatives intended to open the door for local entrepreneurship. Family Care also operates a hotel in Gyumri, Armenia's second largest city, and home to an innovative World Vision project site. World Vision, one of the largest non-profit organizations in the world, has a history of successful adaptation to meet local needs, and we travelled to Gyumri to learn more about their work in Armenia.

West and North from Yerevan to Gyumri

Gyumri lies about 125 kilometers northwest of Yerevan near the Turkish border. We hired a taxi for the trip to Gyumri, which took us through several picturesque towns, each marked with Soviet-style boundary signs. Just west of Yerevan stands Etchmiadzin, the spiritual center of the country for over 1700 years. Etchmiadzin is not directly along the route from Yerevan to Gyumri, but after Deborah crossed herself and pantomimed prayer to supplement her poor pronunciation, the taxi-driver nodded and made the detour. The grounds include a remarkable constellation of edifices and gardens that blend ancient with modern architecture. Visitors kiss the enormous, carved door as they enter the spacious cathedral, and many light candles inside. Women generally cover their heads within Armenian Apostolic Church buildings, often with loose scarves, while men remove their hats to show respect to God. During services, each church is filled with incense and music as priests lead participants through the ancient and lovely Oriental Orthodox liturgy.

Heading north from Etchmiadzin, we enjoyed distant views of Mt. Ararat. Small communities of modest homes, closely situated and draped with grape arbors or flanked by pomegranate trees, interrupted the panoramic countryside. Road quality diminished noticeably in the more remote areas. Approaching Gyumri, we were surprised by a large number of abandoned factories and ruined buildings along the highway. Despite several years of Armenian independence from the Soviet Union, however, about 5000 Russian troops remain stationed in the area (RIA Novosti, 2012),



Etchmiadzin Cathedral

and Armenia maintains positive relations with Eastern and Western governments.

After a couple of hours, our taxi stopped beside a stone wall at the corner of Rustaveli and Abovyan Streets, across from an old, stone church. We entered the double gate to find ourselves in the garden of the Hotel Villa Kars, still under renovation by Family Care Foundation as one of their "Tourism for Development" hotels. Their mission is simple: employ community members, teaching sustainable skills so they can carry their economy, themselves. Local men were working on a construction project in the garden, near a vine of heirloom tomatoes and a basil plant. Two women, mother and daughter, made us welcome. We stashed our packs in huge, sloped-ceiling guest rooms, each furnished with several antique dressers, carved wooden chairs, and handmade Armenian ceramics. During our stay at Hotel Villa Kars, the elder of the two ladies pointed to the group of men and then to her daughter. "Papa," she said, as she pointed again at the men who were renovating the ancient stone building. Antonio later confirmed that her husband was one of the builders, and that he likes to work with complete family units.

Spitak Earthquake, Long-term Damage

On December 7, 1988, a 6.8 magnitude earthquake hit the Leninakan-Spitak-Kirovakan area of northern Armenia which was, at that time part of the USSR. According to the US Geological Society, at least 25,000 people were killed; others estimate that as many as 50,000 people died from the earthquake. Despite extensive international aid, the region has not fully recovered.

Gyumri Homes, September, 2012

Antonio was overseeing the reconstruction project, but he interrupted his work to give us a tour of the facility. A banner that hung in the hotel's forthcoming gift shop celebrated Antonio's appointment as the honorary local consulate of Italy, "consulate onorario d'Italia Gyumri." Throughout our several conversations, he emphasized his role as a partner with Armenian associates who "do all the work and let me pretend to be the boss." Taking this approach, he founded in 1994 the Veratsnund (Renaissance) Art School in the remains of earthquake-devastated Spitak. The school gives children an opportunity to be creative in a safe environment, and the adults who become accomplished artists can sell their merchandise through the Family Care shops.

Antonio claims that the Soviet Union

transferred its "lack of taste" and "desperate poorness" to Armenians, stifling their creativity along with their economy. In response, he aims to inspire local Armenians to build, create, and invigorate their homes and communities. Artisans of ceramics and textiles receive business advice and marketing assistance through the Family Care Foundation, with the intent to help them become self-sustaining.

Antonio Montalto with Veratsnund Art School Ceramics

We liked Gyumri, with its grand city square, wide pedestrian streets, and narrow stone-and-dirt alleyways. The people were friendly, the food was delicious, and the architecture was impressive. At the edge of the central square, the historic Church of the Holy Savior of All stood nearly restored, almost 25 years after the earthquake destroyed over half of the building. Broad pedestrian walkways extended outward from the city center, brightened with flowers, trees, shops, and banners. Nevertheless, within a few blocks of the attractive city center, we passed from expensive community buildings to earthquake-damaged, corrugated-roof houses. Many large, stone buildings lacked windows.

Walking along one of the main roads, we stopped to chat with a group of young men who hailed us in English. They were curious about where we came from and what we were doing in Gyumri. When we told them that we were there to visit World Vision, their faces brightened further. One of the men responded enthusiastically that he works for World Vision, installing playgrounds in parks and schools. The whole group seemed to approve of World Vision's activities, and to feel that the organization makes important contributions to the community.

World Vision, Gyumri, Area Development Programme: Building a Stronger Future for Families

A boxy, once-white Lada bearing an orange "World Vision" sign stopped at the gate of our hotel, where we stood waiting. The tall, thin, sun-tanned driver jumped out of the car and greeted us. "Hello, I'm Arthur!" He shook our hands and loaded our packs into the trunk before we bumped up the stone road toward the World Vision office.

"Are you Armenian?" Sally asked.

Above: Boys Playing Soccer at the Edge of Gyumri City Square
Right: Children Walking along a Gyumri Side Street

Pedestrians in Gyumri

"Yes!" Arthur exclaimed proudly.

Deborah inquired about his history with World Vision, and he told us that he began 10 years ago as a volunteer, then became a paid employee, and is now the sponsorship coordinator. World Vision's financial support comes mainly through matching each child with a specific sponsor from the international community. Ideally, the children and sponsors develop relationships, and the sponsors provide monthly financial contributions that enable the local projects to care for the children. Depending on the individual child's situation, World Vision may provide health care, food, clothing, education, and social support. In addition to the child sponsorship, World Vision helps families and communities in ways that are tailored to the local culture, needs, and resources. Deborah had sponsored a boy in Yerevan until he was drafted into the military upon finishing high school, so she knew from his letters that World Vision Armenia impacts young lives.

We found the World Vision Gyumri office sandwiched between other buildings. The door stood open, and the front façade displayed the same orange "World Vision" sign as the car decal. A few fashionable teenagers chatted on the outside stairs, and inside a smiling girl sat at a desk.

We met a translator, a social worker, and World Vision Armenia's Gyumri Area Development Program Manager, Artak Ordyan. Artak is a native Armenian who attended college in the United States before returning to work for World Vision in Gyumri. He has had years of experience with development work, so we were eager to hear his stories.

The World Vision staff made us very welcome. As we talked, platters of gorgeous sweets appeared, beautifully arranged and accompanied by juice and coffee. Everything was homemade, including the baklava, a dessert that combines layers of paper-thin pastry with nuts, honey, and spices. We were surprised to find baklava in Armenia. Artak explained that it is native, although Turks also claim baklava as their own.

"It's Syrian," stated Sally, matter-of-factly.

Deborah looked up, "um, I think it's Greek."

Artak erupted in deep, round laughter. "So we were holding a conference with nine nationalities - Albania, Romania, Georgia, Abkhazia, Armenia, and others. Three nations brought baklava as their national cookie."

World Vision Armenia

- World Vision first came to Armenia in 1988 in response to the devastating Spitak Earthquake and has been growing, successfully, ever since.
- 23,150 children have been or are sponsored through World Vision in Armenia.
- World Vision has 11 Area Development Programs (ADPs) in Armenia.

World Vision Armenia website, summer 2013

We chatted more over coffee, asking Artak about the challenges and breakthroughs they've had in the Gyumri region. Artak started by telling us about a health clinic that the World Vision Area Development Programme (ADP) had recently renovated in Marmashen, a small village to the north of Gyumri. Armenian emigration has created a shortage of pediatricians and pediatric specialists, particularly in the more remote areas of the country. In addition, economic stress has limited the ability of families and communities to maintain adequate health care facilities. World Vision Armenia works with partners to increase availability of health care and to help families with immediate health needs. "The health center is providing services to the children and the people of four close villages. We did it in collaboration with the village and the community, so we had lots of community meetings. As you know, World Vision ADP never does anything by ourselves. We have lots of community gatherings and meetings, and whatever we do, we do in collaboration with the local government and people. So, the community came up with the idea to renovate the health center. It was in horrible condition, lots of leaks and broken walls, so we helped them. They applied to us, and we asked help from the mayor."

Artak Ordyan, Ph.D., Manager of World Vision's Gyumri ADP

Artak went on to describe several additional Gyumri ADP projects and activities, saying that World Vision tries to give the community a sense of ownership. One type of project that they do regularly is to provide playgrounds for parks and schools. They encourage parents and other members of the community to help install the equipment. This approach reduces the chance of vandalism or destruction of the facility because the local people feel protective over the facility that they have built. "It's about ownership," Artak explained, "Now we have built five playgrounds, and wherever we install a playground, some investments must be done from the community. This way, it will never be broken because the community has ownership, and the child knows that his father helped build the playground."

"We have a huge economic development program going on in Marmashen; we have chosen the most poor families. The poorest of the poor, we call them, and we are providing them with livestock such as chickens. We are helping them with construction materials where they can have places to keep their livestock, and it's like income production. Sometimes we give them cows, but it depends on the context, because in some places they don't have very many fields to take the cows. These families and households are not selected by World Vision; they are selected by GTC, Guardianship and Trusteeship Committees. It's a three-sided filtering of all the households, and we have selected 68 families from the village. Next week we will be building the materials for the livestock where we provide cows to that village."

Playing Chess in a School Corridor

World Vision employs residents of the villages so that they have clear insight as to what the community needs and to develop a sustainable system. As the region's economic situation improves, World Vision may withdraw, and one of their goals is to build local capacity for maintaining and expanding on the work that World Vision has done.

Artak's iPhone beeped and he picked it up, tapped on it, and said, "I just was writing an email to my manager asking permission to install a milking station in the village." The station was intended to provide clean and modern facilities for milking cows and storing the milk under refrigeration for the local farmers. In the past, a milk collector had used his own vehicle to pick up milk from the

farmers and store it for sale in the village. The milk collector had no refrigeration system, so the milk remained at room temperature until it was used. This lack of refrigeration created problems, especially in the warmer months when the milk spoils quickly. Artak was negotiating for a milking station, "we will have milking time in the village. We will have fresh milk: quality great, quantity great. The milk will not be spoiled; the farmers and households will be paid higher for the fresh milk. I want to have for all regions in Gyumri. For that reason I want to have interviews with farmers. We started negotiations with the milk collector and the village mayor. We are not supposed to support private business, but this is like a partnership. The milk collector will operate the operations of the center, we are providing the cooling plant, not the space, and the village mayor—it will be on their ballot, property ballot." This complicated collaboration reflects a key aspect of World Vision's mission, to build sustainable improvements through partnership with local communities. This often requires close cooperation with several local organizations, and tailoring of innovations to accommodate social, political, and economic constraints. A successful project develops technology, processes, resources, and competencies that will empower local people to continue or expand on the improvements. In this case, the local farmers and milk collector will all benefit from their participation in the project, and the facility will continue to operate on municipally-owned land after World Vision provides the milking station and necessary training for its use.

Music Class in a Gyumri Public School

Beyond their child sponsorship and economic development programs, World Vision tries to help with social challenges in the communities where they operate. When we asked Artak about Armenia's problem with emigration, he confirmed that many young men leave their families for work abroad, sometimes coming back, sometimes not. This emigration pattern causes problems for those who stay behind. World Vision Gyumri tries to identify at-risk families and intervene economically so the fathers will not need to seek jobs elsewhere, and they also educate and support children of migrant families. "We have a project called Migration and Trafficking. We call it 'Migration Project,' from that 'MP,' and we have community development, too. The potential migrants or the families of the migrants are provided income generation means. There are about 50 families in that project, the children—that's about 70 children—are trained on migrant issues like trafficking, because these families are still considered high-risk families. It's drug abuse and alcoholism and all the negative impacts of migration. It is academically proven that children of migrant families are at higher risk for underage employment. They tend to have addiction to drugs and alcoholism because their parents are working 20 hours a day. Migrant families, they go to earn money; they have no time to pay attention to their kids."

Another social challenge is protection of human rights in a bureaucratic environment that fosters corruption. "We have a fourth project supporting NGOs. It's basically working with community groups to increase the awareness on civil rights everywhere. We need help in institutions, everywhere they apply, because corruption is mostly a result of unaware people who don't know their own rights." Artak explained that government workers involved in corrupt practices often do not know that bribes and other forms of corruption are not acceptable. To address this complex problem, World Vision partners with other NGOs on human rights education and intervention.

We expressed interest in visiting one of their project sites, and Artak and Arthur took us to one of the schools that World Vision assists. We walked into the building and found an over-sized chess board in the main corridor below a picture of an Armenian chess champion. Artak told us that Armenians are fond of chess, and it is taught in schools to help students develop their thinking skills. The Armenian men's chess team had won the biennial World Chess Olympiads in 2006, 2008, and 2012, inspiring more passion for the game. The school hadn't been able to keep up with the children's interest, so World Vision equipped a classroom with chess sets. They also set up a sewing room where mothers can develop their skills while the children are in school, and they fund special services for students who need speech therapy or counseling that the school can't afford. Taken together, World Vision's role at the school seems to be auxiliary, as they watch for unmet needs and step up to fill them. We were privileged during our visit to hear a class of music students and to pass out bags of school supplies that World Vision had prepared for each of them. In addition to the children in the classroom, mothers and grandmothers lined the wall, singing and smiling at the World Vision team.

Men playing chess in Yerevan

World Vision is able to understand from an internal viewpoint what is needed in the community because the majority of their volunteers and employees are community members. This internal perspective enables them to identify local issues and address them sustainably. By hiring local men to build the playgrounds, World Vision provides community members with dignity and income while accomplishing their goals for the children. By collaborating with NGOs, city officials, schools, and businesses, World Vision develops partnership networks that stand ready to solve future challenges together. This pattern of continuous community engagement supports World Vision's long-range success.

As a regional manager, Artak regularly makes the drive from Gyumri to the World Vision national headquarters in Yerevan. He offered to drive us back to the capital city, and we gladly accepted. En route, we asked about the Armenian Genocide and if the younger generation is affected by it. Artak replied, "we will not forget; it is in our blood." Whether in Armenia or in the diaspora, the genocide continues to impact Armenian culture, and on Genocide Remembrance Day, 24 April, Armenians gather to commemorate the event. World powers have varied in their responses. Some refuse to acknowledge the massacre as genocide because they fear backlash from Turkey. Others, such as the European Union, strive to address the tragedy openly in the hope that honest discussion and remembrance may reduce the chance of future genocides.

Armenia faces challenges to development, but organizations like Family Care and World Vision are actively building local capacity through ongoing partnerships. Antonio's insistence on creating jobs that teach marketable skills works simultaneously toward reaching short-term and long-term goals. Similarly, World Vision builds relationships among stakeholders to address community needs in sustainable ways, from seemingly simple tasks like building playgrounds to the coordination of a milk-collecting and storage process. Both organizations understand that Armenian culture is rooted in faith and family, and they respect those values. With this respectful partnering approach, it is possible to engage the community in successful, lasting development.

Genocide of the Armenians

1894-1896 and 1915-1917

Armenian Genocide Memorial Monument, Dzidzernagabert

Roses at the eternal flame

Armenians under Ottoman Rule

"The Armenians (and the Greek) were dogs and pigs . . . to be spat upon, if their shadow darkened a Turk, to be outraged, to be mats on which he wiped the mud from his feet. Conceive the inevitable results of centuries of slavery, of subjection to insult and scorn, centuries in which nothing that belonged to the Armenian, neither his property, his house, his life, his person, nor his family, was sacred or safe from violence—capricious, unprovoked violence—to resist which by violence meant death! I do not mean that every Armenian suffered so; but that every one lived in conscious danger from any chance disturbance or riot."

William Ramsay, British ethnographer
Quote from Dadrian, Warrant for Genocide

"In 1915, the Turkish government ordered all Armenians in our village to be deported into the Syrian desert… My parents bribed the officials to let us take two small mule-driven carts. Along the way, we had to bribe the guards for food and water. Halfway through our journey, at the town of Ghatma, we passed a death field. Bodies, death were everywhere."

Haygouhi Shahinian, genocide survivor
Quote from Facing History and Ourselves,
The Genocide of the Armenians

Armenia has suffered numerous invasions, occupations, and massacres since becoming the world's first Christian nation in A.D. 301. The largest-scale of these massacres, resulting in 1 to 1.5 million deaths by the order of the Ottoman Turks, has come to be known as the Armenian Genocide.

The Armenian Genocide Memorial Monument, named for the swallow that always returns to its nest, recalls symbolically the sorrow and the resilience of the Armenian people. Outside, a memorial flame represents the eternal Armenian spirit, and a tall adjoining shaft represents the rebirth of the Armenian people. Inside, photos and art commemorate those who suffered during the genocide.

Inside the Armenian Genocide Memorial

Thoughts to Consider

Why might underestimation of Armenian partners be the worst mistake made by international workers? What effect does this kind of error have on the success of a development project?

According to World Values Survey data, Armenian culture places greater emphasis on survival than on self-expression. How might historical events have shaped this value system? How might it affect Armenia's efforts to reduce government corruption and build a stronger economy?

What aspects of the Family Care Foundation's approach for economic development differentiate them from other aid organizations? Under what circumstances might their economic approach be most useful? Under what circumstances might it be less useful?

World Vision is a large, networked organization that enables Artak and other creative project managers to obtain rapid support for unique, local projects that are improving people's lives. Would it be possible for governmental and inter-governmental organizations to emulate World Vision's flexibility? What barriers would need to be removed?

World Vision consistently involves community members in planning and implementing their assistance programs. Why is this important? How might the process be affected by cultural values?

References

Armenian genocide. (2002). In Greenwood Encyclopedia of International Relations. Retrieved from http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?qurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.credoreference.com/entry/abcintrel/armenian_genocide.

Availability and Affordability of Contraceptive Commodities in Pharmacies and Primary Healthcare Facilities in Armenia. Project Nova for review by USAID. (2008). Available at http://www.intrahealth.org/~intrahea/files/media/maternal-neonatal-and-childrens-healthfamily-planning/contraceptive_avail.pdf.

Dadrian, V. (1999). *Warrant for Genocide*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Facing History and Ourselves. (2004). *Crimes against Humanity and Civilization: The Genocide of the Armenians*. Facing History and Ourselves Foundation, Inc.

Fund for Armenian Relief. (2013). About FAR. Retrieved from http://www.farusa.org.

Historic Earthquakes: Spitak, Armenia. US Geological Society. http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/events/1988_12_07.php .

National Statistical Service Armenia, Ministry of Health Armenia, and ORC Macro. (2006). *Armenia Demographic and Healthy Survey 2005*. Calverton, Maryland: National Statistical Service, Ministry of Health, and ORC Macro.

News.am (2012). Armenian government plans to stimulate birth rate. Retrieved 6 September 2013 from http://news.am/eng/news/110128.html

Russia to Double Armenia Base Contract Staff. (2012, June 19). *RIA Novosty*. http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20120619/174124485.html.

United Nations Population Fund, Republic of Armenia (RoA) Ministry of Health, RoA National Statistical Service, and The Republican Institute of Reproductive Health, Perinatology, Obstetrics and Gynecology. (2012). *Report - Prevalence of and Reasons for Sex-selective Abortions in Armenia*. Yerevan, Armenia: United Nations Population Fund.

World Vision, Armenia. (2013). Child Sponsorship. Retrieved from http://www.wvarmenia.am/en.